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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 10th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,  
on Thursday, 18 June 1992, at 10 a.m.

Chairman:

Miss SETH

(India)

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General debate (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

GENERAL DEBATE (continued)

Statement by the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund

1. Mr. GRANT (Executive Director) said that the general debate had confirmed the widely held conviction that the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) had laid a foundation which had made it possible to achieve more for children during the past decade than in any other period in history. Still greater progress was possible in the 1990s and in the next century if the promises of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the World Summit for Children were fulfilled.
2. Virtually all delegations had described the goals and strategies adopted by the Executive Board and the World Summit for Children as a blueprint for action. He was pleased that the majority of countries had made significant progress in preparing national programmes of action and that many had completed them. Many countries had also taken other steps as a follow-up to the World Summit: Norway planned to urge aid recipients to accord higher priority to children, Canada had announced a \$20 million "Partnership for Children Fund", Swedish development assistance would focus on the use of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children as planning tools, and Japan's national programme of action had stated explicitly that the country would increase its contribution to UNICEF. The representative of Brazil had cited many recent ground-breaking legislative initiatives which his country had taken, for which it was to be commended. China had completed its national programme of action and was also preparing local programmes of action.
3. Some donor delegations had referred to the Fund's role in assisting countries in the preparation of national programmes of action. While the representative of Norway had stated that UNICEF should be in the best position to assist, the representative of the Netherlands had insisted that UNICEF should strike a balance between advocacy and programme activity, a concept with which he fully concurred. The representative of Jamaica had welcomed the support proposed in the medium-term plan for the period 1992-1995 (E/ICEF/1992/3) to help countries implement national programmes of action.
4. The representative of Sri Lanka had made special reference to the second South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) conference for children, to be held in that country in September 1992 to review and strengthen the regional plan of action for achieving the goals for children in SAARC member countries and to consider ways of implementing national plans. It should be recalled that the first SAARC conference on children, held at New Delhi in 1986, had marked a turning-point for children in that region.

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5. Many delegations had referred to the momentum for children's rights generated by the adoption and the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. A number of countries had also described actions at the national level to prepare for ratification and implement the Convention. Several countries had mentioned the important role of UNICEF in promoting and supporting the ratification of the Convention and its implementation through country programmes. While such praise was gratifying, support for the implementation of the Convention was a collective task, to be shared by all agencies of the United Nations system, non-governmental organizations and all groups in society having responsibility for children.

6. A number of statements had pointed to the need for special protection for children affected by armed conflict. A pattern of protecting such children had been emerging since 1989; all parties to a conflict should be called upon to respect that trend and to take special measures to rehabilitate children who had endured the trauma of war. Further efforts must be made in that area and more creative solutions must be found.

7. He had taken note of the proposal by the representative of Spain that a World Day of the Rights of the Child should be celebrated each year on 20 November, the anniversary of the General Assembly's adoption in 1989 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and of its adoption in 1959 of the Declaration of the Rights of the Child. In considering that proposal, the Board should take into account the fact that many countries had already established national days for children.

8. He strongly endorsed the suggestion by the representative of Switzerland that reinforcing national capabilities should become a permanent operational principle of UNICEF, drawing attention in that connection to paragraph 99 of the medium-term plan for the period 1992-1995 (E/ICEF/1992/3). The Swiss suggestion that all evaluations should measure progress in that area would be implemented.

9. With regard to the need for a comprehensive approach, also emphasized by the representative of Switzerland, it was in fact the Fund's policy to be comprehensive in its analysis of situations affecting children and women. The actions which UNICEF supported, however, must be selective, and based on areas of comparative advantage and the priorities set by the Executive Board.

10. He assured the representative of Denmark that whenever major new policy initiatives were undertaken, they were invariably discussed with representatives and staff in country offices. He cited by way of example the regional consultations which had taken place prior to the elaboration of the goals and strategies proposed for the 1990s and, more recently, consultations with field staff prior to the launching of the "baby-friendly" hospital initiative. The representative of Denmark had also expressed concern as to

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the relationship between global goals and the country-programme process. The national programme of action was precisely the mechanism for adapting global goals to national realities.

11. With regard to the question of field office participation in an institutional dialogue on policy issues, raised by the representatives of Denmark and Norway, he drew attention to paragraphs 116 and 117 of document E/ICEF/1992/L.9, which indicated that UNICEF would continue to give priority to supporting and strengthening the role of the country offices. The document provided many examples of how lessons learned through country programmes were applied in policy discussions at the national and global levels. Indeed, several delegations had cited the joint evaluation of the Bamako Initiative as an example of the use of such lessons to improve the Fund's effectiveness. The proposal for a three- or four-year thematic rolling evaluation plan would strengthen the learning process based on country experience.

12. He continued to support operational and applied research, not only for the Children's Vaccine Initiative, but in all areas relating to UNICEF programming. He agreed with the representative of Australia that improvements in evaluation ought to strengthen the capacity of field offices to monitor and to evaluate their programmes. The need to place greater emphasis on fortifying the management of the evaluation function in UNICEF was reflected in his recommendations to the Board (E/ICEF/1992/L.9, paras. 123 and 124).

13. Numerous statements had made it clear that the international economic crisis had not abated, and that Africa was still the most severely affected continent. Goals for children and the return to sustainable economic growth could be achieved in many countries only if viable solutions to the debt problem, including debt cancellation, could be found. The resources allocated for debt repayment could be used to promote future growth through investment in programmes benefiting children.

14. As several delegations had noted, poverty alleviation was the single most important challenge to economic and social development. He therefore appreciated the continued support expressed for the Fund's work in the area of structural adjustment and for its efforts to include all sectors in the debate on ways of sustaining economic growth while alleviating poverty.

15. The needs of Africa's people in particular remained acute. Numerous delegations had welcomed the preparations for the Organization of African Unity (OAU) international Donors' Conference on Assistance to African Children, to be held at Dakar, Senegal, in November 1992. Some countries, however, had expressed concern as to the need for or the prospects for success of such a conference. In his view, the Conference would be the most important event of 1992 for the implementation of the goals of the World Summit. Before the end of the session, he hoped to discuss with the delegations in question the concerns they had, so that OAU and the African countries might enjoy the support they needed.

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16. Assigning the highest priority to Africa did not mean neglecting other regions. While Africa's situation was the most fragile, Asia, particularly South Asia, continued to have the largest number of people living in poverty. UNICEF would continue to be responsive to the needs of all regions of the world, as appropriate.

17. Several countries had urged UNICEF to continue - and to intensify - its support for the least developed countries. In that connection, he drew attention to paragraph 268 of document E/ICEF/1992/3, which noted that the current system of allocating general resources ensured that priority would be given to children in the least developed countries. As part of its commitment to the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the 1990s UNICEF would continue to apply those allocation criteria during the 1992-1995 period.

18. Numerous countries had addressed the issue of emergencies. Several delegations had praised the UNICEF field staff, especially those working in emergency and conflict situations. He expressed appreciation to the delegations of France and Zimbabwe for their kind words regarding Dr. Marta Pampalova, whose death in Somalia had been a tragic reminder of the perils faced by staff working in conflict zones.

19. With regard to the reorganization of emergency operations in the United Nations system and the need for UNICEF to play a full and supportive role in the development of the new Department of Humanitarian Affairs, he recalled that UNICEF had been very active in the discussions which had preceded the reorganization. The secretariat would report to the Board in 1993 on the implications for UNICEF of the creation of the new Department. Under the auspices of the new Emergency Relief Coordinator's office, UNICEF continued to work closely with other operational agencies in the field, especially the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the World Food Programme (WFP).

20. UNICEF had been organizing Emergency Management Training Workshops for its staff, Government counterparts and other agencies for more than five years. The most recent workshop for French-speaking African countries had been held the previous month at Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. UNICEF welcomed and would participate in the training initiative sponsored by the Department of Humanitarian Affairs and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). As several delegations had noted, there was a need to ensure that the linkage between emergency activities and development work was maintained and strengthened. That issue was addressed in chapter II of document E/ICEF/1992/11.

21. The Ethiopian Government was to be commended for sponsoring the recent summit meeting on political, social and humanitarian issues facing the Horn of Africa, and he welcomed efforts to ensure that all parties agreed to the

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principles first established on a large scale by Operation Lifeline Sudan, which allowed for the unimpeded delivery of humanitarian assistance to civilians.

22. He thanked the representative of Angola for his kind words concerning UNICEF emergency assistance to that country. It was to be hoped that the current programme of rehabilitation and development in Angola would be equally effective.

23. He had taken note of the request by Iraq for more information on the situation of children in that country. As Iraq was currently preparing a country programme, fuller documentation on that subject would be presented to the Board at its 1993 regular session.

24. He expressed appreciation to the observer for the Holy See for his positive and principled comments on emergencies and underscored the comments made by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees concerning sanctions. In his view, basic foodstuffs and essential drugs should be exempted, and humanitarian agencies should be given expanded resources to meet the needs of vulnerable groups, such as children and mothers, who were adversely affected by sanctions that sought to influence the actions of their countries' leaders.

25. He noted with satisfaction that numerous countries had highlighted the significance of child immunization in the development of health programmes and had encouraged further strengthening of the expanded programme on immunization. Many countries had begun to strengthen their disease surveillance capabilities and were advancing towards the eradication of poliomyelitis and neonatal tetanus. If the health goals for the 1990s were to be achieved, further progress would be needed in the prevention and treatment of acute respiratory infections, diarrhoeal disease control and immunization. In that connection, the critical role of oral rehydration therapy in reducing deaths from cholera in Peru represented a significant breakthrough.

26. In reply to the request from the representative of Czechoslovakia for clarification concerning the respective roles of the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF in the programme for acute respiratory infections, he said that WHO and UNICEF worked closely in policy and programme development. WHO provided technical advice, while UNICEF was more involved in programme implementation at the country level.

27. Several countries, notably India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, were making progress in their integrated approaches to child survival. The Children's Vaccine Initiative would be essential to the sustainability of immunization programmes, and he commended Morocco on its pioneering role in launching the Vaccine Independence Initiative.

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28. With regard to family planning, Austria and the United Kingdom had drawn attention to the unfortunate situation of women in the republics of the former Soviet Union who resorted to abortion as a principal means of family planning. UNICEF would focus on that issue in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

29. He had taken note of the Australian representative's recommendation that UNICEF should expand its activities to such areas as malaria control. UNICEF was providing pemethrin impregnated bed-nets, which were being used with favourable results in some African countries. UNICEF would also be an active participant in the WHO International Conference on Malaria, to be held in October 1992.

30. He had taken note of the requests by the representatives of Bangladesh, Germany and the United States of America for greater UNICEF involvement in family planning at the field level. He had also noted the concern expressed by the Holy See that UNICEF should remain sensitive to the views, values and priorities of the countries concerned. In its collaboration with UNFPA, UNICEF would continue to play a role in spreading knowledge and in advocacy, as well as in supporting programme activities which contributed to the success of family-planning efforts. Family planning was an integral part of the safe motherhood programme, and further training for staff in that area would begin in Africa in September.

31. Many delegations had urged UNICEF to intensify its response to the acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) crisis, drawing attention to the multisectoral social context in which prevention and care must be undertaken. The UNICEF programme approach focused on preventing transmission among young people at greatest risk through a range of education measures. In addition, the scope of primary health care activities would be widened to cover sexually transmitted diseases, in line with the need for broad-based community approaches to the AIDS pandemic. In response to the need for improved inter-agency collaboration in AIDS control, UNICEF had strengthened its relationship with the WHO Global Programme on AIDS and with bilateral agencies, both at headquarters and in the field. However, the ultimate responsibility for programme coordination remained with national programmes, necessitating a substantial injection of additional resources.

32. Substantial progress had been made towards the eradication of guinea worm disease before the end of the 1990s, through collaboration with national programmes and bilateral and international agencies. If successful, that effort would mark only the second time in history that a disease had been eradicated. Greater community involvement was also required to ensure the success of the campaigns against polio, measles and neonatal tetanus.

33. A number of delegations had highlighted the need to give greater attention to young people, particularly young women. One third of the world's population was between the ages of 10 and 24, four fifths of whom lived in

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developing countries. Young people represented a vast potential resource that warranted much greater investment.

34. Contemporary youth lived in conditions of rapid urbanization, profound media influence, severe pressures on family structures, increased exposure to harmful substances and decreased economic opportunities, with a concomitant rise in health problems, accidents and violence. Such negative influences should be minimized and children should be provided with the support and opportunities they needed to reach their true potential.

35. The Bamako Initiative had significantly strengthened health systems in many countries by making primary health-care services more readily available through cost-sharing and co-management. UNICEF would continue to implement the Initiative in keeping with the recommendations contained in document E/ICEF/1992/L.20. Strengthened national capabilities and popular participation were essential prerequisites for improved and sustainable health-care delivery systems, and he fully concurred with the view that the Bamako Initiative was the most viable way of attaining sustainable primary health care. Board members had been challenged to identify and study successful community initiatives, and UNICEF would continue to promote individual country evaluations, adapting the methodology applied in the Bamako Initiative evaluation.

36. Agreeing with the representative of Italy that the Bamako Initiative could be expanded to the level of full national programmes, he urged donor countries to make it a priority for supplementary funding. The rapid deterioration of health structures in Eastern Europe and the countries of the former Soviet Union, where UNICEF was being urged to play a more active role, led him to question the relevance of cost-sharing and co-management in that area of the world. He had taken note of the concerns expressed by the Republic of Korea on the issues of community involvement and the availability of foreign exchange for essential drug imports.

37. The "baby-friendly" hospital initiative had helped accelerate the implementation of the Innocenti Declaration on the Protection, Promotion and Support of Breast-feeding. He commended a number of countries on the steps they had taken to ensure that mothers could exercise their right to breast-feed their infants. Welcome progress had been made in 1991, with 52 leading hospitals in 12 developing countries making major changes in their maternity practices. UNICEF also hoped to create an environment in which its female staff could breast-feed their infants exclusively, and he intended to raise that issue with other United Nations agencies as well.

38. UNICEF and WHO had obtained a commitment from the 33-member Infant Food Manufacturers Association to cease the distribution of free and low-cost supplies of formula to hospitals in all developing countries, subject to the enactment of appropriate legislation by Governments. Together with the

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Director-General of WHO, he had written to every Head of State seeking such action. The progress report requested by Turkey on manufacturer compliance would be prepared after an evaluation of the situation.

39. Several delegations had stressed the importance of basic education in human development, national capacity-building, the sustainability of development efforts and, in particular, efforts to improve the status of women. The education of women and girls was seen as crucial in controlling fertility and family size, while UNICEF support for primary education and, in particular, its focus on the education of girls and women would help to sustain the momentum created by the World Conference on Education for All held at Jomtien, Thailand. The Chairman had suggested that UNICEF and UNESCO should help countries formulate action plans for the attainment of educational goals set in response to the declarations of the World Summit for Children and the Jomtien Conference. UNICEF had played a key role in the Jomtien Conference and in follow-up activities at country, regional and headquarters levels and a report on its response had been prepared for distribution.

40. The reduction of UNICEF expenditure on education, noted with concern by India, was due to the significant increase in resources diverted to meet emergencies and would, he hoped, be halted in the near future, subject to the availability of increased supplementary funding. In collaboration with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), donors and non-governmental organizations, UNICEF was assisting many countries in promoting girls' education, which it regarded as one of the major objectives of its basic education policy. The greatest challenge facing UNICEF in the sectoral field was the need to achieve a breakthrough in basic education, and he hoped to report on significant progress in that area at the 1993 session of the Board.

41. The National Committees had highlighted the importance of the education for development policy for their activities. The National Committees had been instrumental in mobilizing public opinion and, working with country offices, would be responsible for implementing the new policy, which had a vital role to play in enabling young people to shape the world's future.

42. Many delegations had stressed the importance of women's and girls' development, drawing attention to key women's issues and emphasizing the need to increase women's involvement in decision-making and to promote their education and access to income-earning opportunities. UNICEF programmes strongly advocated the participation of women in decision-making at all levels and efforts to increase men's involvement in child-rearing. He shared the concern expressed by the representative of Zimbabwe about violence against women and children and welcomed the progress achieved by Bangladesh, India, Morocco and Thailand at the policy level in promoting the development of girls. He encouraged other countries to make similar political commitments.

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43. In response to the call by Ethiopia and the United Kingdom for greater attention to women's health needs, he drew attention to the safe motherhood initiative and the AIDS prevention strategies promoted by UNICEF and WHO. He noted also the recommendation by Barbados, the Republic of Korea and Sweden that there should be greater investment in girls and women. Unfortunately, apartheid of gender was still very much alive in the world: in 1991 the death of 1 million female babies could be directly attributed to their sex. Further progress must therefore be made in suppressing socio-cultural attitudes and practices which heightened disparities between girls and boys.

44. Many delegations had noted the severe plight of women and children in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, but emphasis had also been placed on the need not to divert resources from developing countries, particularly those in Africa. The reports of the WHO/UNICEF collaborative missions had been welcomed as objective and informative, and they corroborated concerns expressed by Russia and the Baltic States concerning the need for critical medical supplies. The options recommended in document E/ICEF/1992/L.14 had been broadly supported, and, while different approaches had been suggested by various delegations, there was general agreement on the need for a strengthened UNICEF emergency response capacity. The repeated call from many delegations for collaboration and coordination among United Nations organizations, other donors and non-governmental organizations would be particularly closely heeded in UNICEF actions to benefit Eastern and Central Europe. UNICEF was actively participating in the Inter-agency Task Force on Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States and had participated as part of a unified United Nations delegation in a Conference held at Lisbon to discuss assistance to the Commonwealth. In addition, consultations had been initiated with the World Bank, the European Economic Community and a number of bilateral agencies, and field activities were being closely coordinated with all partners in the common system.

45. Many delegations had welcomed his initial proposals relating to the reform of the United Nations system, and a number of them had emphasized the need for future reforms to build on and not undermine the strengths of UNICEF. He was convinced that reforms could be achieved that would both improve coherence and enhance effectiveness, and he reiterated that many reform measures could be implemented by secretariats and inter-agency bodies.

46. Greater attention had been given to funding issues in 1992 than in recent years. There had been encouraging increases in general resources contributions, particularly from France and the United States of America and he welcomed the stated intention of Japan, Norway and Sweden to increase their contributions to UNICEF. Valuable funding initiatives had also been described by other countries, including Canada and the Netherlands, and he particularly

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welcomed the public support shown through the National Committees, which had contributed 25 per cent of the Fund's income. UNICEF faced difficult challenges in an uncertain funding climate, and should be conservative in its income projections while engaging in vigorous fund-raising. A number of countries had commented on the important debt relief for children initiatives, and he urged donors to heed the call for additional supplementary funds for Africa. He wished to assure the Board that, while UNICEF recognized the importance of the additional resources made available through supplementary funds, it attached priority to increasing its general resources.

47. Noting the satisfaction expressed by the National Committees and the United States of America with the medium-term plan sections on external relations, he assured the Board that UNICEF would continue to plan its activities in that area at all levels in consultation with Board members and the National Committees. As the representative of Denmark had noted, external relations activities would continue to rely on the use of advocacy and social mobilization at all levels of UNICEF.

48. The National Committees had made valuable contributions by mobilizing support for the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, helping to develop national programmes of action in their countries, supporting the development of new Committees and implementing the "baby-friendly" hospital initiative. Specific efforts would be made to strengthen the capacities of National Committees in Central and Eastern Europe and to establish Committees in the Baltic States.

49. He noted the close cooperation between the UNICEF Geneva office and the NGO UNICEF Coordinating Committee on Activities for Children in Eastern and Central Europe as well as UNICEF cooperation with non-governmental organizations in developing countries, to which a number of delegations had referred. He urged all Governments to employ innovative methods to engage non-governmental organizations and other partners in their efforts to meet goals for the 1990s: only through concerted efforts by Governments, United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations could the abhorrent apartheid of gender be abolished, and he pledged continued support to the NGO Committee on UNICEF in its efforts to promote girls' education.

50. Finland, Japan and Norway had suggested that UNICEF should exercise caution in its income projections. In fact, the Fund's income projections were modest, owing to the budgetary constraints placed on many donor Governments by the global recession. The medium-term plan had sought to balance the Fund's ambitious goals with its financial resources, and the issue would be discussed in further detail in the Committee on Administration and Finance.

51. Welcoming Brazil's endorsement of his recommendation regarding UNICEF headquarters accommodation, he assured the representative of Japan and other Board members that the matter would be discussed with flexibility in the

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Committee on Administration and Finance, and that the non-financial aspects of relocation would be thoroughly assessed, while respecting the need to find the option most consistent with sound financial management.

52. He joined many delegations in commending the budget reference group for the valuable guidance it had provided, which would lead to greater clarity and transparency in UNICEF budget-related documents. The group's recommendations would be implemented, subject to the approval of the Executive Board.

53. He fully concurred with those delegations that had stressed the need to maintain UNICEF as a field-based organization and assured the Board that UNICEF would continue to be the most decentralized agency of the United Nations system, with the vast majority of its staff in the field. The percentage of staff in the field had grown to 84 per cent in 1992 and was expected to grow still further during 1994-1995.

54. He welcomed the support expressed by Japan and the Republic of Korea for the proposed extension of the 6 per cent recovery charge to emergency programmes and reiterated the view of ACABQ that the current recovery policy should be expanded to meet the additional requirements. UNICEF was prepared to submit detailed information on those requirements to the Committee on Administration and Finance for its consideration. The emergency recovery rate charged by other United Nations agencies ranged from 3 to over 13 per cent, and while UNICEF offered a wider scope of support services than most other agencies, its proposal fell near the lower end of the range.

55. Recalling the view expressed by the representative of India that UNICEF was the keeper of the collective conscience of nations and their peoples and had been entrusted with responsibility for the poor, the weak and the vulnerable of the world, he assured the Board that the search for betterment was indeed the driving force behind the UNICEF secretariat's work.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.